Northern Region Fishing Forecast

Langlade County

Last summer, the Antigo dredge crew dredged Woodboro Springs in Oneida County. The Northwoods Chapter of Trout Unlimited provided money to cover the dredge fuel costs. It really turned out nice! It will take the pond several years to fully saturate with trout and reach its new potential with the improved habitat and increased living space for trout.

In 2006, Polar Springs in Langlade County will be dredged, so look for our crews out there. The Antigo Chapter of Trout Unlimited is donating money to cover the dredge fuel costs for this project. It's a high-quality pond and outlet creek to the Hunting River within the category 5 regulations section. We anticipate a tremendous positive response by the trout population to this habitat restoration and enhancement project.

Stream habitat improvement work was completed on a section of Spring Brook on the north side of Antigo last summer. The Antigo Chapter of Trout Unlimited assisted with funds to hire an excavator for this project. In 2006, a habitat project on the Middle Branch of the Embarrass River south of Antigo is in the negotiation phase. The Antigo Chapter of Trout Unlimited will provide money and labor if this project gets off the ground.

The spring pond dredging and stream improvement projects are your trout stamp dollars at work. A sincere thank you to our local Trout Unlimited chapters for the great cooperation and generous support of these habitat projects!

Plans for McGee Lake include using rotenone to eliminate the unwanted largemouth bass and to restock the lake with brook trout that will reproduce and repopulate the lake through natural reproduction. There are not many brook and rainbow trout left in the lake as predation by bass, which were illegally introduced into the lake, is really taking its toll. None of the brook trout naturally reproduced in McGee Lake are making it past the bass.

Before treatment in October 2006, we will capture as many brook trout from McGee Lake as we can and hold them at a local hatchery. These brook trout will be spawned and the young raised and restocked back into McGee Lake. Before the illegal introduction of largemouth bass, the brook trout showed a great ability to spawn and reproduce. Two spring areas that are important for trout spawning and rearing were dredged last fall in preparation for the renovation. Before treatment this fall, McGee Lake remains a nice place to go to take home some pan-sized bass. Anglers are encouraged to harvest all bass up to their daily limit of five. Most of the bass are 7 to 12 inches, but go all the way up to 19 inches. The lake is south of State Highway 64, so bass can be harvested from May 6 through Sept. 30, 2006.

We will be finishing up the Wolf River trout study this summer. Last spring we attached floy tags to 1,800 7- to 10-inch brown trout before stocking, about 15 percent of the 11,500 stocked. We continue to encourage anglers to report all tagged fish caught to the Antigo DNR Service Center (715) 623-4190. Reporting catches of tagged fish will provide us with vital information on carry over of trout from year to year, growth rates, and important habitat areas. If you catch a tagged fish, please note the data and location of the catch, the tag number and color, the length of trout, whether the fish was released or harvested, and what you caught the fish with (bait, spinner, fly, etc.). In 2004, we implanted radio transmitters in 23, 11- to 20- inch brown trout we surveyed from the Wolf River. All of the batteries in these tags have expired and we are summarizing the telemetry information. The

Wolf River Chapter of Trout Unlimited contributed money towards the airplane time it took to do the telemetry……thank you! We are learning some very good information that will help us better manage the Wolf River system for trout. Look for summary reports and meetings with interested anglers throughout 2006. If you catch and harvest one of these fish with a wire antenna sticking out of the belly, please return it to us so that we can replace the batteries and reuse the tag in a future study. The return address is written on the side of the radio tag. Thank you!

In 2005, full lake surveys were done on Enterprise, Mary, Moccasin, and Otter lakes. Enterprise Lake remains a top destination for walleye and muskellunge and there are also some nice smallmouth bass. Mary Lake is good for largemouth bass and panfish. Moccasin Lake is a good largemouth bass and muskellunge fishery. There are only about 75 walleye in Moccasin Lake total (0.7 per acre), but if you are lucky enough to catch one of them, chances are it is a fish over 20 inches. Otter has good walleye, largemouth bass, and perch populations. For a small lake it has outstanding fish populations.

Our fall electrofishing schedule took us to seven lakes where we are evaluating walleye stocking success (or failure) and natural walleye reproduction. In 2005, natural reproduction of walleye in Enterprise Lake was good while Otter Lake had a low level of naturally produced walleye. We found just one naturally reproduced walleye in Upper Post Lake. No natural walleye reproduction was found in Moccasin, Rolling Stone, Summit, and White lakes last year. We also did not find any of the 14,100 small fingerling walleye we stocked into Summit Lake in June 2005. This was disappointing as we are trying to build the walleye population to take advantage of an overabundant small perch population. We will continue to try.

Last year, brook trout surveys on one section of the East Branch of the Eau Claire River were up 5 percent over the long-term average from 1986-2005. Our population estimates showed there were almost 3,200 4-inch and larger brook trout per mile in this section of stream. This estimate is down about 100 fish per mile from the 2004 estimate. We see fluctuations in trout numbers from year to year likely in response to environmental conditions such as drought, warmer-than-average summer temperatures, colder than average winter temperatures, etc. Let's hope that we receive a healthy snowpack this winter and timely rains next spring and summer so that we can start to turn the corner on the moderate drought we have been experiencing the last three to four years. With favorable stream flow conditions and temperatures, trout numbers in 2006 may rebound to the record-high levels we saw from 1993-95 when we estimated 4,000 to 5,000 4-inch and larger brook trout per mile in this section of stream! We are close to that now and only time will tell what next summer's numbers will say.

Last spring we were able to complete trout surveys on Garski, Krause, McGee, Rabe, Saul, and Shadick springs. We were pleasantly surprised by what we found! With the exception of McGee Lake, all of these spring ponds held nice numbers and sizes of trout. We hope this sampling of spring ponds is reflective of what the other spring ponds in the area contain. If you've never fished for trout in a natural spring pond, you are missing out on a unique and beautiful experience.

In 2006, full lake surveys will be done on Pence Lake and Townline Lake and fall electrofishing surveys on Lawrence, McGee, Mueller, Summit, and Upper Post lakes. Weather and time permitting in the spring, we have trout surveys planned for Hatton, Nixon, Polar, and Starks springs. – *Dave Seibel, fisheries biologist, Antigo*

Lincoln County

Our full fish survey in 2005 on the Spirit River Flowage revealed a good walleye population, an abundant northern pike population, and a muskellunge population with low numbers but large sizes. We estimated the walleye population at 2.9 adult fish per acre, average for northern Wisconsin's naturally reproducing walleye lakes. Northern pike were numerous but the bulk were on the small side at less than 20 inches. They should provide excellent ice fishing in coming years. If you are lucky to hook a muskellunge, there's a good chance it will be worth your time. We netted and shocked some 45-plus inch muskellunge out there. Finding them and then getting them to bite might be an issue as the flowage has 50 miles of shoreline and a large prey base of suckers, redhorse, and bullheads. As with most flowages, panfish densities are low but the size quality is high. Perch, bluegill, pumpkinseed, and crappie are your best panfish bets.

We did fall electrofishing surveys on six lakes and impoundments where we are evaluating walleye stocking success (or failure) and natural walleye reproduction. In 2005, natural reproduction of walleye in the Spirit River Flowage was good and even though we didn't find any walleye reproduction in Tug Lake from 2005, the year before must have been pretty good as we found several 1.5 year old walleye there. No natural walleye reproduction was found in Halfmoon, Pesabic, Seven Island, and Somo lakes last year.

Stream habitat improvement work was completed on a section of the Prairie River upstream from Prairie Forks Drive last summer. Boulders were placed in the stream for fish habitat and channel shaping was done through a one-third mile stretch. In 2006, habitat work is planned at the confluence of the North Branch Prairie River and Kippenberg Creek. The Wisconsin Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited and the Friends of the Prairie River group assist with these habitat projects through funds to purchase boulders and excavator hours, and also through lining up easements with private landowners to allow us to do the work. These stream improvement projects are your trout stamp dollars at work. A sincere thank you to our local Trout Unlimited Chapters and the Friends of the Prairie River for the great cooperation and generous support of these habitat projects!

Last summer, trout numbers in the Prairie River climbed by 26 percent in one survey station and 9 percent in another. This represents an increase of 250 to 550 4-inch and larger trout per mile of stream. This is somewhat surprising considering the warm and dry summer that we had last year. A third survey station showed a 13 percent decline (220 fish per mile). These three stations averaged 2,100 trout per mile, which is 9 percent above the 2004 estimates but still 35 percent below the long-term average of 3,200 for these sections. The Prairie River in 2005 had increased trout numbers for the second year in a row, a trend we have seen in other area trout streams. This is good news for trout anglers. Let's hope that this trend continues into 2006! If it does, we could be at or above long-term average trout numbers this summer or next as stream trout populations respond very quickly to favorable environmental conditions. Size structure of trout in the Prairie River remains good, with brook trout over 15 inches and browns over 21 inches captured in our surveys.

In 2006, full lake surveys will be done on Seven Island Lake and Somo Lake. If weather and time permits, fall electrofishing surveys will be done on the Rice Reservoir (Bridge Lake, Deer Lake, Lake Nokomis, and the Rice River Flowage), Spirit River Flowage, and Bass and Long, Pesabic, Squaw, and Tug lakes. – *Dave Seibel, fisheries biologist, Antigo*

Sawyer County

Our pilot project for lake management planning continued in 2005. Public input sets management goals and objectives, allowing the manager to prescribe strategies to achieve those outputs. So far, Nelson Lake has a completed plan which is already in the implementation stage. The key item is a major initiative to rehabilitate the walleye population via stocking of extended-growth (6 to 8 inches)

fingerlings. About 12,000 large fingerlings were stocked in 2005 as part of a joint effort between DNR, the Nelson Lake Association, Walleyes for Northwest Wisconsin, and the Red Cliff Tribe. New regulations for bass and northern pike that are consistent with the new management plan goals have been proposed for public consideration at the 2006 Spring Hearing of the Conservation Congress. Public input sessions were held for Lac Courte Oreilles, Grindstone Lake, the Chippewa Flowage, and Round Lake in the summer of 2005. Goals and objectives were developed. Management plan strategies are currently being formulated for these waters. In 2006, this process will be used to begin developing management plans for "The Quiet Lakes," Moose Lake, Spider Lake, and the Tiger Cat Flowage. "Management by Objectives" is a promising focus of future fishery management in the Upper Chippewa Basin.

An integrated project aimed at improving panfish populations and walleye sizes on four lakes -- Black Dan, Island, Winter, and Moose – continued in 2005. Extended-growth (6-8 inch) walleye fingerlings are stocked the fall in three of the lakes as an extra predator for panfish control. Small panfish are removed by spring fyke netting from two lakes and then stocked into Moose Lake, where natural panfish recruitment is poor. Predators are protected by special regulations including a 14-18 inch protected length range for walleye on Lake Winter, and a 28-inch minimum length limit on Black Dan and Island lakes. The program has been in place four years. Our objective for improving panfish populations so that 25 percent of bluegills exceed 6 inches has been achieved on three of the lakes. Our spring 2005 population estimate for walleye in Lake Winter was 1-2 adults per acre as a result of low stocking densities of 5 extended-growth fingerlings per acre in alternate years, but the average adult fish was 22 inches long. This project will continue for two more years with financial support from the Winter Lakes Alliance and the Moose Lake Improvement Association.

A study of the genetic background of wild brook trout in the Namekagon River drainage is in its first of four years. The stream stocking program for the Couderay River, Weirgor Creek, and Namekagon River below Hayward has now been shifted over to 100 percent wild-strain (Timber Coulee) spring fingerling brown trout. This strain outperformed domesticated hatchery strains by a wide margin in these study waters. Wild brook trout are definitely on the increase in the upper Namekagon following the Shultz Springs restoration project in 2003-2004. The Phipps reach shows signs of now supporting some of its best wild trophy brown trout since 1983, despite some summer-kill in the hot summer of 2005. This reach remains total catch-and-release.

Walleye **-** Populations are stable or increasing in most waters. Best bets are Teal Lake, the Chippewa Flowage, Grindstone Lake, and even Round Lake. The 14- to 18-inch slot length limit at Grindstone has allowed the development of excellent size structure in that population. Some walleye populations are in trouble due to decreased reproduction, lack of small fingerling survival, and competition/predation from largemouth bass and perhaps crappie. Nelson Lake and Smith Lake fall in this category. The rehabilitation program in Sand Lake appears to be on track for complete recovery in 2007-2008.

Bass - Bass fishing and populations have probably never been better in most waters, at least not since walleye became established in most of our lakes in the late 1950s. Sawyer County is split by the early/late season line. Because bass populations have increased on both sides of the line, we believe size limits and voluntary release (not the later opener) have been responsible for the changes. Currently there are almost too many great bass waters in Sawyer County to list, but here are the best of the best. For smallmouth bass, try Round, Grindstone, Lac Courte Oreilles, Chippewa Flowage (east basin), and all forks and branches of the Flambeau and Chippewa rivers. For largemouth bass, try Spider chain, Tiger Cat chain, Mud/Callahan; Chippewa Flowage (west basin); Smith Lake, Nelson Lake, Totogatic Flowage, and Lake Hayward.

Panfish - Good fishing for preferred-size bluegills (greater than 8 inches) and crappies (greater than10 inches) will be found mostly in waters with restrictive bag limits like Nelson, Chetac, Sissabagama, Sand, Moose, and Christner, along with lakes that have difficult or privately controlled access. The Chippewa Flowage (mostly west basin, but some east) has become a major producer of preferred-size bluegills over the past few years. This surprising but welcome development may be the result of more stable water levels and plant growth in recent years.
Past experience has taught us that even in large lakes like the Chippewa Flowage, panfish can be overharvested. We will be monitoring the panfish situation on the Chippewa Flowage, where crappie and bluegill are important to local stakeholders and visiting anglers alike.

Muskellunge - Really big muskellunge are and always have been rare, though "sub-trophy" fish in the 40-50 inch range are increasing in many county waters. The best bets for trophy muskellunge in Sawyer County are the Chippewa Flowage, Lac Courte Oreilles, Grindstone Lake, Round Lake, and a handful of smaller, sleeper lakes that are best left unnamed. Good action lakes where trophy size is less likely due to higher numbers include Lost Land and Teal, Winter, Moose, Sand, Spider, and Big Sissabagama. Pure action lakes with abundant but small fish include the Tiger Cat chain and Mud/Callahan lakes (great places to take a kid fishing). Habitat protection and management of harvest are now the most effective tools available to the muskellunge manager. The importance of stocking, irregardless of strain, appears to be waning except in waters where increasing numbers of northern pike and/or largemouth bass may limit, to a variable extent, the natural recruitment (survival to catchable size) of young muskies, via predation.

Trout - Stocked brown trout have grown fast to sizes up to 24 inches in Big Round Lake, but low interest and even negative sentiment toward brown trout at our summer 2005 public visioning session will spell an end to active brown trout management there. Lakes like Perch, Camp Smith, and Ashegon remain good put-grow-take trout fisheries. The smaller lakes are now stocked more cost-effectively with entirely wild-strain spring fingerlings (stocked a year before they are big enough to catch). Ashegon Lake is one of the most diverse two-story fisheries around. This 78-acre lake north of Couderay produces good fishing for largemouth bass, walleye, northern pike, five different species of trout, and an occasional big panfish as well. It also hosts cisco and is reputed to have a few, very large muskellunge. If you plan to fish Ashegon, be aware that motor trolling is not legal here or in most Sawyer County lakes. Consult the regulations pamphlet for a list of water-specific special regulations, including motor trolling.

Northern Pike - Nelson Lake remains a good bet for large northern pike. Their role in this ecosystem as the ecological equivalent of muskellunge (very rare in Nelson Lake) was strongly endorsed by the 41 participants in our 2004 fishery visioning session. Consistent with the resultant plan, a 32-inch minimum length limit for Nelson Lake pike will appear as a question at the 2006 Spring Hearing of the Conservation Congress. Two other good bets for northern pike in Sawyer County include Grindstone Lake (very large fish, but not as abundant as the lake's muskellunge) and Lac Courte Oreilles (many mid-size fish that far outnumber the lake's muskellunge). Recent data analyses cast doubt on the traditional view that northern pike always out-compete muskies in our waters. In many lakes and most rivers, we have documented strong unstocked muskellunge populations coexisting with established northern pike. We now feel that if spawning and nursery habitat is intact, the two esocids can coexist. Our challenge will be to maintain the desired balance in which species has the upper hand. – *Frank Pratt, fisheries biologist, Hayward*

Washburn County

The bass size limit was removed on Long, Big and Middle McKenzie and Nancy lakes last May in efforts to maintain the size quality of largemouth bass and allow the forage base to recover. Largemouth bass populations had exploded after size limits went into effect in 1989, with angler catch rates, once considered good at 0.25 bass per hour, typically exceeding one bass per hour.

Unfortunately, the forage base isn't keeping pace with the higher bass numbers, reflected in slower growth rates. Largemouth are taking two years longer to reach the statewide 14-inch minimum size limit and growth rates after they reach legal size are declining too. The forage mismatch also may be impacting natural recruitment and stocking success in some northwestern walleye fisheries. It's still too early to assess how the liberalized regulations are working, and if walleye populations will rebound. However, Long Lake had a fall walleye fingerling count 10 times larger than any in the past twelve years. The other three lakes have shown no increase. It may take some time. Bass anglers are indoctrinated to catch and release. Liberal regulations have little effect if people don't take advantage of them, so anglers are encouraged to catch their limit on these lakes. - *Larry Damman, fisheries biologist, Spooner*

Price, Rusk, and Taylor counties and Flambeau River State Forest

Nearly 450 anglers, lakeshore residents, business owners, fishing guides, and visitors collaborated with fishery managers at fishery management visioning sessions to define the desired future condition of the fishery in 32 lakes and reservoirs throughout the Upper Chippewa River Basin. Since April 2004, local lake associations have sponsored 16 of these visioning sessions, covering roughly 10 percent of the 311 waters with public access and management potential. Staff from DNR's fisheries and habitat protection program facilitated these highly interactive sessions, which typically lasted 3 to 4 hours. Through a series of questions and a show of hands, stakeholders were asked to prioritize fish species of interest and identify for those species the relative importance of numbers versus size and catch versus harvest. Language for goals and objectives (sometimes called performance measures) were drafted for five or six species from the consensus of participants in consultation with DNR's fisheries biologist, who served as technical advisor to the group on what was possible. Participants understood and agreed that professional fishery managers would select the most appropriate course of action once goals and objectives are identified and adjusted to incorporate statewide angler preferences and the lake's capability to produce what is desired.

The Butternut Lake Fishery Management Plan, one of several plans completed in July 2005, contains goal statements, management strategies to achieve them, and objective standards to gauge progress. Stakeholders wanted to maintain a moderately high density and sustainable harvest of walleye while improving walleye size distribution. Participants clearly preferred a balance between muskellunge numbers and size, desiring neither a strictly "action" fishery with high catch rates, nor a strictly "trophy" fishery with a substantial proportion of the population longer than 50 inches. They expressed a strong desire to create and maintain good fishing for panfish, particularly black crappies, yellow perch, and bluegill. After stakeholders defined the future condition and established performance measures, three fisheries biologists worked together to draft and revise the plan. They described the current status of the top five species of interest, offered recommendations to the lake association, and formulated several interrelated strategies, which in combination are designed to achieve the desired state.

Fishery Management Plans are intentionally considered long-term strategic plans because they set no deadline or schedule for implementation. Each year will bring its own fiscal constraints and work priorities, and we cannot commit department or partner resources to a specific operational schedule for funding and action.

In Price, Rusk, and Taylor counties, fishery visioning sessions were held in 2005 for Chequamegon Waters (Miller Dam Flowage), Phillips Chain of Lakes, Solberg Lake, Lac Sault Dore (Soo Lake) and Grassy Lake, Island Chain of Lakes, and the four lower Flambeau River flowages. The resulting Fishery Management Plans for these waters should be completed by July 1, 2006.

DNR would like to thank the sponsors who arranged logistics and promoted the visioning sessions. Their advertising efforts ensured that many stakeholders had the opportunity to contribute. Most

importantly, we thank the participants for their meaningful public input that will establish direction for fishery management in the Upper Chippewa Basin where the quality of fishing means so much to our quality of life.

The tentative schedule for visioning sessions in 2006 includes Potato Lake in Rusk County, the Pike Lake Chain and four flowages on the North Fork Flambeau River in Price County, and four lakes within the Flambeau River State Forest in Sawyer County. Watch the local newspapers for the time and location for each session.

Cranberry Lake

Results from electrofishing and fyke netting surveys in 2005 confirmed anglers' reports that Cranberry Lake provides good fishing opportunities for panfish, walleye, and largemouth bass. Presently, the predator-prey interactions in Cranberry Lake appear to be in balance, maintaining bluegill and black crappie populations in low to moderate abundance and allowing a substantial proportion of individuals to grow large. A sample of 181 black crappies 5 inches and longer was captured by netting in August 2005. Of those, 72 percent reached or exceeded anglers' "preferred" length of 10 inches and 46 percent were longer than the "memorable" size of 12 inches. A sample of 61 bluegills 3 inches and longer had a similar size distribution, with 85 percent growing to "quality" size (6 inches) and 38 percent reaching the "preferred" length of 8 inches. These favorable panfish length distributions are largely attributed to predation, particularly from walleyes, which prevents crappie and bluegill populations from becoming overabundant and stunted. With too many individuals, panfish must compete with each other for limited food, thereby inhibiting their growth potential. Walleye, largemouth bass, and northern pike sustain themselves at sufficient densities to keep panfish populations in check.

As the word spreads about good fishing in Cranberry Lake, casual observations of increased fishing pressure have raised concerns about overharvest. Overexploitation can quickly shift the size structure of panfish populations downward, decreasing the proportion of desirable-size fish. Black crappies are particularly vulnerable to overharvest by angling, and their length distribution often does not recover until fishing pressure subsides. To protect the high-quality fishery in Cranberry Lake, anglers are asked to voluntarily limit their daily harvest to no more than five black crappies over 10 inches long and no more than five bluegills over 8 inches long. Because good fishing for panfish depends on the right amount of predation from game fish, we also ask anglers to practice restraint and limit walleye harvest to three or fewer fish per day. This proactive strategy with voluntary harvest restrictions is aimed at immediately protecting game fish and panfish populations against overharvest and avoiding potential damage that may occur before sufficient information becomes available to support pursuing formal changes to existing fishing regulations.

Lake sturgeon

Successful sturgeon anglers in the Upper Chippewa Basin may have noticed new procedures when they registered their catch in 2005. Using equipment purchased with a federally-funded grant from the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan, cooperators at registration stations are now scanning each harvested sturgeon for Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tags. The new procedures are part of a long-term project to assure that sturgeon populations continue to produce a surplus for harvest. PIT tags, about the size of a rice grain, transmit a unique electronic code when activated by a tag reader. DNR fisheries staff captured and marked 75 sturgeon from the Chippewa, Flambeau, and Manitowish rivers by injecting a tag into the base of the pectoral fin. The PIT tags will identify each marked sturgeon for its lifetime. We believe lake sturgeon can provide a sustainable hook-and-line fishery if anglers harvest fewer than 5 percent of adults in the population annually. Exploitation rate is computed from the ratio of tagged sturgeon harvested to tagged sturgeon at large. In 2005 anglers harvested 78 adult sturgeon from waters open to sturgeon fishing in the Chippewa River Basin. Registration stations recovered two PIT tags from sturgeon harvested in the North Fork Flambeau

River, where five marked sturgeon longer than the 50-inch minimum length limit were at large. DNR's fisheries teams in Park Falls, Hayward, and Mercer will continue to mark sturgeon annually, expanding their efforts to additional locations when staff and funding are available. State and federal resource managers will share useful information on sturgeon exploitation rate to evaluate the effectiveness of current management strategies and recommend appropriate changes as warranted. Tags returns will also provide useful information on lake sturgeon movements.

Equipment purchased from the same wildlife conservation grant will help to restore sturgeon to their historic range in the headwaters of the Chippewa River system. Because the active spawning period for lake sturgeon is very brief, usually less than 24 hours, remote water temperature monitoring equipment should improve the sporadic success of ongoing propagation efforts to rehabilitate the remnant sturgeon population in the Manitowish River. In April 2005, DNR watershed program staff installed and tested a temperature probe in the North Fork Flambeau River below the Turtle-Flambeau Dam where sturgeon congregate to spawn when water temperature reaches 53° Fahrenheit. The local fishery team in Mercer can now monitor water temperature via computer, so they can decide when conditions for sturgeon spawning are optimal.

Last May the Mercer and Park Falls fisheries teams collected and fertilized 47,000 eggs from three female and three male sturgeon captured below the Turtle-Flambeau Dam. The 2005 propagation effort marked the third success in artificially spawning sturgeon since annual attempts began in 1992.

DNR provided 22,000 fertilized eggs to the Lac du Flambeau Tribal Hatchery under a cooperative fish rearing agreement. The remaining eggs were incubated and raised at the Wild Rose Hatchery. Hatchery staff stocked 18,300 sturgeon fingerlings into the Manitowish River in July, August, and September of 2005. Evaluation results show that the two successful propagation efforts from the mid-1990s have added two year-lasses into the Manitowish River sturgeon population between the Turtle-Flambeau and Rest Lake dams. Beginning in 2000, annual gillnet samples included immature sturgeon, some of which exceeded 40 inches long in 2005. There is still no evidence of natural reproduction in the Manitowish River, however, we remain optimistic about the prospects for successful restoration of a self-sustaining sturgeon population. Male sturgeon from the first hatchery-reared group should mature in about six years, and females from that group should reach maturity around 2021. In the meantime, discussions are underway to modify the seasonal operation of the Rest Lake Dam in order to provide more favorable flows that maintain suitable sturgeon spawning habitat in the Manitowish River.

Pike Chain of Lakes

Four fisheries teams from northern Wisconsin converged with their netting and electrofishing gear on the Pike Lake Chain several times in 2005 to assess the fish community and estimate the density of walleye and muskellunge populations in Pike, Round, Amik, and Turner lakes. The fish community was similar in all four lakes of the Pike Lake Chain. In netting and electrofishing samples collected during the 10 years from 1994 to 2005, DNR captured 23 species in Amik Lake, 24 in Pike Lake, 23 in Round Lake, and 19 in Turner Lake. Game fish included walleyes, northern pike, smallmouth bass, muskellunge, and largemouth bass. Black crappies, bluegills, and pumpkinseeds were the most common panfish. Two fish species with elevated protective status have been found in recent surveys: the greater redhorse, classified as "threatened," and lake sturgeon, listed as a "species of special concern" under Wisconsin's Endangered Species Act. No exotic fish species are known to occur in the Pike Chain of Lakes.

Walleye are the predominant game fish species in the Pike Chain of Lakes. Anglers can expect to find a walleye population of low to moderate density in the Pike Lake Chain. Round Lake had the highest walleye density at 4.9 adults per acre. Estimated adult walleye density was 2.9 per acre in Pike Lake, 1.7 per acre in Turner Lake, and 0.9 per acre in Amik Lake. Walleye density is considered to be low at

less than one adult per acre and moderate to high at 4 to 8 adults per acre. Fyke net samples from Turner Lake had the highest proportion of walleyes 20 inches and longer. Walleye in the Pike Lake Chain grew slower than other walleye populations in northern Wisconsin. Based on ages determined from scales and spines collected in 1998, male walleye grew to 15 inches in seven years and females reached the same length in six years.

Radio telemetry and recapture of fish given different marks indicated that walleye move among the four lakes of the Pike Chain, especially during their spawning period in April. In 1988 several mature walleye with surgically implanted radio transmitters moved from Pike, Amik, and Turner lakes to the gravel and cobble substrate in Round Lake to spawn, then dispersed throughout the chain. At least one radio-tagged female walleye used the same spawning site in consecutive years. A low-head dam prevents fish movement between the chain of lakes and the South Fork Flambeau River downstream. A creel survey is currently underway to estimate angling pressure and harvest on the Pike Chain of Lakes during the open water and ice covered periods in 2005 and 2006.

The density of muskellunge in the Pike Chain is unknown. However, in April 2005 DNR began a survey to estimate adult musky density in Pike, Round, and Turner lakes. Examining the ratio of recaptured fish in our upcoming spring 2006 survey will allow us to estimate density. Of the 50 muskellunge marked in 2005 that were 20 inches or longer (stock size), 29 percent reached memorable size (38 inches) in Pike Lake. The size distribution of the adult musky population was similar in Round Lake, where 33 percent of 51 stock-sized fish reached memorable length. Under current management, DNR has classified the Pike Lake Chain as an "action" fishery for muskellunge. Anglers who fish the Pike Chain can expect higher musky density and higher catch rates, but smaller-sized fish in comparison to average musky fisheries in northern Wisconsin. Muskellunge reproduce naturally in the Pike Lake Chain. DNR stocks 12-inch muskellunge fingerlings into Round, Pike, and Turner lakes at a rate of 0.5 fish per acre in alternate years to supplement recruitment and to sustain the "action" fishery. There are no special fishing regulations for muskies on the Pike Lake Chain. Anglers may take the daily bag limit of one muskellunge at least 34 inches long from May through November.

Although largemouth and smallmouth bass are a substantial component of the fishery in the Pike Chain, little is known about their population status. Samples from surveys designed to target walleye and muskellunge also included smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, black crappies, and other panfish. However, those samples may not properly characterize the abundance and size distribution of black bass and sunfish populations, primarily due to the selectivity of the gear and the timing of survey effort. – *Jeff Scheirer, fisheries biologist, Park Falls*

Barron and Polk counties

In 2005, fisheries staff conducted four comprehensive fish surveys, several dozen general lake surveys and sampled over 50 streams in the local area. The following information provides anglers with a summary of those sampling efforts.

Red Cedar Lake

About 3,800 adult walleye are present in Red Cedar Lake. This population estimate was similar to a population estimate in 2001, but lower than a previous population estimate in the 1980s which was nearly 7,600 adult walleye. Red Cedar Lake also had a low density but quality-sized bass fishery. The southern portion of Red Cedar Lake contains more shallow water habitat, which is better suited for largemouth bass and panfish, whereas the northern and central portion of the lake contains mostly rocky shorelines with larger woody debris which is better habitat for smallmouth bass. Northern pike were common on all three lakes with an average size structure. Yellow perch abundance appears to be down but a desirable bluegill and black crappie population was present on the entire three lake chain.

Granite Lake
Granite Lake has a moderate density walleye population but the size structure consists of mostly smaller fish 12 to 16 inches. Largemouth bass were found in low numbers but the fish were in excellent condition. Modest numbers of bluegill, black crappie and yellow perch were found with a slightly above average size structure. The boat landing and parking on Granite Lake is poor; smaller boats are recommended.

Balsam Lake
Largemouth bass are the dominant game fish, with about 25,000 largemouth bass larger than 8 inches roaming the waterbody. In 2002, DNR liberalized bass regulations because bass growth rates declined and the overall condition of bass was poorer when compared to past fish surveys. Anglers are allowed and encouraged to keep one bass less than 14 inches as part of their daily bag limit of five bass in total. The regulation is designed to reduce the number of smaller bass in the lake and allow the larger bass to grow faster and fatter because of less competition for the available forage. The walleye population continues to decline on Balsam Lake, and was estimated in 2005 at 1,650 adult walleye. This is almost half the number of fish present from a 2002 estimate of 3,100 adult walleye. We do not know why the walleye population is still declining, because DNR has been aggressively stocking walleye in the lake over the past decade with limited success. It appears predation from other fishes may be a key limiting factor in walleye recruitment. In 2004 and 2006, larger size walleye fingerling (averaging around 7 inches long) will be stocked in an effort to increase recruitment of stocked walleye. More restrictive walleye regulations may also be pursued in the future to protect the declining walleye population.

Bone Lake
Based on the results of our 2005 spring survey, the musky fishery in Bone Lake appears to be lower than historic levels, but quality fish are present in desirable numbers. More specifically, 247 muskellunge greater than 30 inches were captured in 2005. Of those fish, 53 or 22 percent were larger than 40 inches. This more than doubles the average for a typical northern Wisconsin muskellunge lake based on the percentage of fish collected larger than 40 inches. In addition, five females in excess of 45 inches were also collected. Also, for the first time, 40-inch male muskellunge were present in the population. Final results of the population estimate will be available in fall 2006.

Apple River Watershed
Fisheries staff surveyed about 50 sites on the entire Apple River Watershed and all tributary streams from the headwaters at Staples Lake downstream to the Polk County Line. Smallmouth and largemouth bass and northern pike were present in low numbers in the Apple River downstream of Amery to the St. Croix/Polk County Line as well as Wappogassett and Balsam branches upstream to the Kennedy Dam. Only largemouth bass and northern pike were collected upstream of Amery in the Apple River and Fox Creek. Future plans may consist of re-introducing smallmouth bass upstream of Amery. Burns, Omer and Peabody Creeks had low density trout populations and they are marginally fishable because of excessive tag alder and reed canary growth. Trout restoration efforts are planned for Bull Brook, Behning and Friday creeks.

In winter 2005, DNR, in cooperation with the Polk County Sportsman Club, Osceola Rod and Gun Club and the Polk County Parks Department, installed an aeration system in Lotus Lake near Dresser. Largemouth bass, northern pike and bluegill have been stocked over the past two years in an effort to restore the fishery. It will likely take several years before anglers can expect to have large numbers of fish available for angling purposes. In summer 2005, DNR and the Pipe Lakes Management District installed 40 half-log structures in Pipe Lake. These structures provide overhead cover as well as increase spawning success for smallmouth bass and other fish species. In fall 2005, fisheries staff replaced the aeration system at Twin Lakes near Mikana in Barron County. The existing system was underpowered and outdated. The newer system is expected to double the air flow and hopefully prevent any future fish winterkills from occurring.

About 2,400 feet of stream habitat restoration work was conducted on Turtle Creek in southwestern Barron County. In addition, a small unauthorized rock structure that prevented upstream fish passage and impounded several large spring was removed from Osceola Creek in western Polk County. Additional stream habitat restoration activities are planned for Osceola Creek in 2007. – *Heath Benike, fisheries biologist, Barron*

Bayfield County

Lake Nebagamon

Walleye averaged 16 inches from a fyke netting survey in spring 2005. Density of walleye appears to have declined from past surveys. Extensive stocking of walleye fry, small fingerling and large fingerling as well as spawning reef construction and an attempt to re-establish a riverine spawning population of walleye in Minnesuing Creek has been conducted in the recent past in an attempt to bolster walleye densities. Reports from anglers and the creel clerk indicated a good number of walleye that were 10 to 13 inches being caught in the 2005 open water season. These walleye may increase walleye densities in the near future. Spring electrofishing in 2005 for smallmouth bass indicated a good size structure with a 14.1 inch average and 50 percent of the fish over 14 inches. Northern pike from the 2005 spring fyke netting survey averaged 21.1 inches with the largest caught at 40.9 inches.

South Fork of the White River

An intensive trout habitat project was started in fall 2005 and will continue in summer 2006 to improve trout habitat in the South Fork of the White River, which has been identified as a major source of recruitment for the White River as a whole.

White River

A three-year project wrapped up data collection on the White River in the fall of 2005. Focus groups have been conducted in late winter 2006 and information regarding findings, comparisons to historic data, and potential management recommendations will be reported in the spring of 2007. This has been an ongoing project that should help answer questions regarding the status of the brown trout fishery. Thanks to everyone who participated in the creel surveys in the past two years!

Douglas County

Whitefish Lake

Walleye, smallmouth and largemouth bass population estimates were conducted in spring 2005. Walleye densities have remained similar to surveys conducted in 1988 and 1991 and were 1.05 adult walleye per acre, typical of oligotrophic or low productivity lakes in this area. The size structure of walleye remained good with 55 percent over 15 inches. Smallmouth and largemouth bass densities were low, however, both had good size structures with 54 percent of smallmouth greater than 14 inches and 55 percent of largemouth greater than 15 inches. – *Scott Toshner, fisheries biologist, Brule*

Iron County

We have placed a priority on improving fish populations for high-priority species on many lakes over the past eight years in Ashland and Iron counties. Since the mid-1990s, prime operational goals have been to improve walleye population size structure and to increase panfish angling opportunities. Strategies used to achieve these goals have included: 1) forage (prey fish) enhancement to increase game fish growth rates; 2) habitat improvement; and 3) panfish stocking. Before our management efforts in 1997, the walleye-dominated fish community in **Pine Lake in Iron County** had a severe shortage of prey. Panfish numbers were extremely low in comparison with similar waters and the panfish fishery was virtually non-existent. A total of 78,971 adult yellow perch (253 per acre) and 17,543 adult bluegill (56 per acre) were transferred to Pine Lake over a five-year period. These fish were removed from waters where small panfish were overabundant as a result of predator losses during partial winterkills. In 2005, a comprehensive survey of Pine Lake indicated that our forage

enhancement project had created higher-density, self-sustaining forage fish populations and improved catches of panfish. Daily fyke net capture rates for bluegill in Pine Lake increased from less than two fish per net in the mid-1990s to greater than 20 per net in 2005. Recent data also reveal a dramatic increase in yellow perch density in Pine Lake. We captured over 1,000 yellow perch per net in 2005. Most of those perch were young-of-year (hatched in 2005) or yearlings (hatched in 2004) – all providing abundant prey for walleye. A self-sustaining panfish fishery now exists and some large bluegill and yellow perch are showing up in the catch. Other waters where this strategy is being implemented are Island, Spider, and Long lakes in Iron County, and Lake Galilee in Ashland County.

The **Gile Flowage in Iron County** is the only known inland lake in Wisconsin to be infested with the exotic ***spiny water flea***. Discovered in 2003, this invader may have been transported to the Gile by anglers fishing in Chequamegon Bay of Lake Superior. We have been monitoring this situation and have implemented a public awareness program to help people understand the threat posed by these creatures. Spiny water fleas are native to northern Europe and prey on other smaller species of zooplankton. They have long spiny tails that prevent them from being readily consumed by larval fish. The potential risk of this exotic species to the fish community is its ability to create shifts in native zooplankton populations and possibly impact survival and recruitment of juvenile fishes. Overall impacts on the fish community cannot be predicted at this time. Based upon events in Fish Lake, Minn., there is evidence that sufficient predation by adult panfish can eliminate spiny water fleas on a lake like the Gile Flowage. Therefore, in 2005 we transferred 34,289 bluegill and pumpkinseed to the Gile from other waters overcrowded with panfish in an effort to increase panfish density and eradicate the exotic invaders. Future stockings are planned. **Anglers are advised to strictly adhere to guidelines posted at all the boat landings to prevent further infestation of the Spiny Water Flea into other inland waters.** *– Jeff Roth, fisheries biologist, Mercer*

Vilas County

Kentuck Lake

As of Nov. 1, 2005, the walleye regulation on this lake has changed from an 28-inch minimum and a bag of one to no minimum size but only one fish kept may be 14 inches or larger. The final bag limit will depend on tribal declarations. This relaxing of the regulation was due to an increase in the adult walleye population from an estimated low of 574 fish in 1999 to 9,549 in 2005.

This high density walleye fishery may be having negative effects on the historically good bass/panfish fishery of Kentuck Lake. The department will be pursuing a more restrictive bass regulation (18-inch minimum and one fish bag limit) to protect this fishery. This regulation change would not take effect until May 2007. Until this regulation takes effect we are asking anglers to practice catch and release for bass on this lake.

Long Lake

Illegal rainbow smelt introductions into this lake in the early 1990s has harmed the fish community. Once a thriving natural walleye fishery, we now must stock Long Lake to provide a meager fishing opportunity. In the fall of 2005, 5,600 yearling lake trout were stocked in the lake in an effort to establish a population and provide a cold water predator on the abundant smelt forage base. To protect the lake trout, this lake will have a 30-inch minimum length and one fish bag limit in place starting May 2006. Anglers are encouraged to report any lake trout they may catch to our Woodruff office. Seining or dip-netting of smelt is not allowed.

Sparkling Lake

Since 2002, we have annually stocked 3,000 6- to 8-inch walleye fingerlings into this lake in an effort to rebuild the fishery. Spring surveys to estimate survival of these stocked fish has found better than 30 percent survival in the last three years, compared to almost no return after prior stockings of smaller fingerlings. In spring 2005 we captured many fish from the 2002 stocking that were mature and attempting to spawn. Hopefully, if we see continued success we will again have a naturally sustained

walleye fishery in this lake. This work is part of a larger 10-year UW-Madison project to evaluate the responses of exotic species such as rainbow smelt and rusty crayfish to biological control and manual removals.

Walleye Slot Size Limit Evaluations
As part of a statewide plan to evaluate walleye regulations placed on lakes in 1997, we will be surveying walleye populations in six lakes in the county that have a protected slot size limit on them. This work was started in the spring of 2005 and will be completed in 2007. Lakes included in this project and survey years are White Sand and Lost Canoe, Big Portage, Forest, Plum and Anvil. Results from these surveys will be reviewed along with those from other lakes statewide. Hopefully we will be able to determine if this special regulation can provide quality fishing opportunities on these types of waters.

Trout Lake
Trout Lake contains a genetically unique population of lake trout maintained primarily by stocking. Much work has been done in recent years evaluating the status of this population but many questions remain. As part of this work we have marked hundreds of adult lake trout with colored plastic tags to monitor their growth and estimate the size of the population. Anglers who catch lake trout can help fish management staff by reporting the number of trout caught and if they contained a tag or not. If anglers obtain the tag number and provide an address, we will provide the known history of that particular lake trout. – *Steve Gilbert, fisheries biologist, Woodruff*

Florence and Forest counties

Anglers in Florence and Forest counties in 2006 will be able to choose from a great variety of waters having both warm- and cold-water species. The two counties are home to 1,085 lakes, ranging in size from small ponds to large lakes and reservoirs, and a combined total of 912 miles of trout streams. In addition, the lower Brule and Menominee rivers in Florence County offer large-river, warm-water fisheries.

We completed comprehensive fishery surveys on two Florence County lakes in 2005. Sealion and Cosgrove lakes are good examples of the smaller lakes in the county offering primarily largemouth bass and panfish, but also with high quality, low-density walleye populations. Sealion Lake had a fair bass population, some very nice sized. There is an abundance of woody cover to fish. Bluegills and crappies were the most common panfish, both with an average size structure. Walleyes were estimated at less than one adult per acre but the majority were larger than 20 inches.

We found good numbers of largemouth bass in Cosgrove Lake, mostly shorter than 14 inches. Bluegills were the most common panfish, having an average size below 7 inches. Adult walleyes were estimated at only one per acre, but like Sealion, most were over 20 inches long.

A late spring netting survey of the Spread Eagle Chain in Florence County found a moderate panfish population, mostly bluegills with some crappies and rock bass. Most bluegills and crappies were on the small side, although we found some nice ones of each species. The chain has a diverse fishery of panfish, large- and smallmouth bass, northern pike, and walleyes, along with a developing musky fishery.

Anglers should again be able to access the Brule River Flowage (the “Backwaters”) in Florence County starting with the open-water season. The reservoir was drawn down for dam repairs during most of the 2005 open-water season, making boat access nearly impossible. Water levels returned to normal in fall 2005 and should remain at normal levels. The flowage has a diverse warm-water fishery, with walleyes and muskies being the most popular for anglers.

Two adjacent lakes in Forest County, Butternut and Franklin, should provide some excellent fishing for northern pike in 2006. After more than 10 years of a restrictive trophy pike regulation, they will open up in May with the standard five bag, no minimum size regulation. Several studies of the lakes showed the trophy regulation didn't produce greater numbers of larger pike as expected, but overall numbers are up. A related concern is the steady decline of walleye in both lakes to near-historic lows. A smaller pike population should help walleye numbers recover.

Florence and Forest counties have an abundance of trout streams. Most are smaller streams with native brook trout; some are larger streams and rivers with both brookies and browns. DNR stream surveys in 2005 found good numbers of trout in Johnson and Woods creeks in Florence County. Sections of the Pine and Popple wild rivers continue to produce good brook trout populations, with an occasional trophy brown.

Regular monitoring and removal of beavers and dams in both counties has paid dividends for trout, with most of the smaller, colder streams supporting good brook trout populations. An intensive beaver removal effort in tributaries of the Pine and Popple wild rivers has greatly improved conditions for trout in that watershed. Streams are again running colder and trout from the Pine and Popple can once again seek spawning sites and refuge from the warm waters of summer. That was especially important during the drought and warm water conditions of this past summer. - *Bob Young, fisheries biologist, Woodruff*

Oneida County

In Oneida County, we conducted spring game fish surveys on Mildred, Thompson, Two Sisters, Clear, Carrol and Madeline lakes, with all six showing good numbers of bass. Mildred, Carrol and Clear Lakes had the highest densities while Madeline and Thompson had more large bass. Two Sisters and Clear both had moderate-density walleye populations with very good size structure. Thompson showed lower numbers but good size of adult walleyes, and there was a year-class of fish 10 to 12 inches just entering the fishery.

Thompson, Madeline and Carrol had strong populations of northern pike along with respectable numbers of muskellunge. Clear Lake has had a 50-inch minimum length limit on its low-density muskellunge population since 2003. The largest fish handled last spring was a 46.5 inch female and over half the fish in our nets were 40 inches or larger. A musky survey on Lake Tomahawk found very good size structure, including two 35-pound females. Lake Tomahawk also had the best size and numbers of bowfin (also known as dogfish) I've ever seen.

A panfish survey on Pelican Lake turned up great size and numbers of bluegill, along with good numbers of crappie and several year-classes of perch that are just beginning to reach catchable size. Bluegill were abundant in our fall survey of Oscar Jenny Lake, along with excellent largemouth bass size and numbers and a few large northern pike.

Last summer's Woodboro Springs dredging project was a success. Spring ponds contain large upwellings of groundwater that provide living space, spawning habitat and a thermal refuge (from extreme heat and cold) for fish living in the ponds and connected stream system. Over time, the upwelling springs, runoff, vegetation, and woody debris that has fallen into these ponds fills them until they can no longer sustain a healthy population of brook trout and the minnow species that the trout feed on. Dredging sets back the geologic clock on the ponds by removing centuries worth of accumulated sediment and debris. It will take a few years for the existing brook trout population to grow into the newly-created habitat, but good numbers of smaller trout were already spawning in the ponds last fall. Woodboro Springs is on county land and the Oneida County Forestry Department cooperated with DNR while Wisconsin Trout Stamp and Northwoods Chapter of Trout Unlimited provided funding for the project.

After two years of budget cuts that resulted in almost no put-and-take trout stocking in Oneida County, trout quotas are back online. Look for brown trout in Dorothy and Squash lakes; stocking of rainbow trout is planned for Perch, Hawk, Long and Little Bass lakes. Brook trout will go into Mercer Springs and Brown, Gudegast, Noisy, Scott, Starks and Thunder creeks. - *John Kubisiak, senior fisheries biologist, Rhinelander*

Lake Superior

Spring is one of the best times of year to visit Chequamegon Bay. Shortly after ice out, anglers start trolling for coho and chinook salmon, brown trout, splake, and lake trout but may also catch walleye and northern pike. Conservative regulations have created a trophy smallmouth bass fishery and the opportunity for catching large walleyes in Chequamegon Bay in May and June. Fishing in the bay does not require a large boat as long as anglers check the weather forecast before hitting the water. Studies in Chequamegon Bay indicated that coolwater predators such as walleye and northern pike were consuming newly stocked brown trout and splake. Therefore since 2003, brown trout and splake have been stocked offshore in hopes that they will have a higher survival rate and provide a better return to the anglers' creel. Past studies also have indicated that there was a poor return on stocked Chinook salmon in Lake Superior. In 2005, an experiment was undertaken in conjunction with the Saxon Harbor and Apostle Islands Fishing clubs to increase survival of stocked chinook salmon. Chinooks were held in net pens, built and maintained by the fishing clubs, for a period of time in local marinas before stocking. The hope is that the salmon will imprint and return to those areas to create angling opportunities.

There is plenty of spring time fishing opportunities in Lake Superior's tributaries. Many of the rivers have excellent steelhead populations. Fishing conditions in the tributaries depend on snowmelt and precipitation in April. Trolling near the mouths of the tributaries also provides an opportunity to catch trout and salmon.

The most important work being done to sustain and improve stream spawning trout and salmon populations involves projects in the headwater areas of many of Lake Superior's tributaries. Poor land management of our watersheds in the past 150 years has resulted in degradation of in-stream fish habitat. Crews have been removing debris accumulations such as tag alder and remnant beaver dams, and results have been spectacular. Gravel that was buried under several feet of sand for decades has been re-exposed. Almost immediately trout and salmon began actively using these areas for spawning. Restoring the pre-settlement snow-melt and rainfall characteristics, "slowing runoff flow rates," of the watershed is also important in reducing the sedimentation that degrades fish habitat.

Summer is an excellent time to fish for lake trout. Trolling around the Apostle Islands can produce nice catches of lake trout with the average fish measuring over 22 inches. More restrictive regulations on recreational and commercial fishing, refuges, and sea lamprey control have allowed lake trout to increase dramatically since the 1960s. Eighty-eight percent of the lake trout caught are wild fish, indicating that natural reproduction continues to support the population among the Apostle Islands. If you don't own the boat and equipment suitable for Lake Superior, contact one of the several charter captains. If anglers catch lake trout that have colored tags, they are encouraged to report the fish's length, tag number, and capture location to the local DNR office. The information gathered from tag recaptures is invaluable to fish managers.

As water temperatures cool down in the fall, trolling off the mouths of the tributaries can produce good catches of brown trout, chinook and coho salmon. These fish are staging near the mouths before entering the rivers. Fall is still a good time for smallmouth bass and walleye in Chequamegon Bay. Regardless of the season, anglers are encouraged to check with the local sport shops for the latest weather and fishing conditions. - *Michael Seider, fisheries biologist, Bayfield*